

Humility

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 March 2023

Preacher: Jeremy Sarber

[0 : 00] If you will, go with me to Philippians chapter 2. Philippians 2. I'll read Philippians chapter 2, starting with verse 1, and this will actually be our primary text of study this week and for the next two weeks.

We'll just plant ourselves here. This is Philippians chapter 2, verses 1 through 11. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.

Being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[1 : 43] From the beginning, one of the great challenges of the church has been avoiding division. We see that in many parts of the New Testament, including here in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Paul wouldn't need to encourage people to have the humble mind of Christ if the threat of infighting and division didn't exist. The church has always found reasons to fracture, and that seems to be exacerbated in our times, primarily, I assume, because of the internet and the way we're super connected in a way that we've never been before.

I remember hearing of one church down in Texas that split years ago over the issue of lightning rods. There's probably some young people here who doesn't even know what a lightning rod is.

I don't know. Well, when one of the deacons installed a lightning rod on the building, there were a handful of people in the church that got very upset, claiming that it displayed a lack of faith in God to protect the church building.

The argument got very heated. People eventually chose their sides, and the group eventually split into two different churches. Of course, stories like that would be comical.

[3 : 07] If they weren't so tragic. As I said, the threat of division in the church is always real and certainly present today. Jesus said, if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul writes, I fear that perhaps when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish, that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

It broke Paul's heart to see any church destroying itself from the inside out. If you pay attention as you read Paul's letters, you'll find him addressing divisions, or at least potential divisions, in almost every letter.

Why is that? Well, first of all, he knew it was a problem from the very beginning of church history. Second, he knew the threat was always present and will always be present to some degree or another.

In his commentary on Philippians, William Barclay writes, the one danger which threatened the Philippian church was that of disunity. There is a sense in which that is the danger of every, listen, healthy church.

[4 : 33] It is when people are really in earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, that they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide.

It is against that danger Paul wished to safeguard his friends. Barclay makes some excellent points worth considering. Disunity is not a threat only to unhealthy churches, but perhaps even more so to healthy churches.

This is true for at least two reasons. First, what kind of church do you think the devil is more interested in attacking?

Already unhealthy churches or currently healthy churches? I think the answer is rather obvious.

Second, disunity is a threat to healthy churches because healthy churches value the truth. That's part of what makes them healthy. Healthy churches believe in and contend for sound doctrine.

[5 : 38] Healthy churches are more sensitive to theological errors. So as counterintuitive as it seems, healthy churches can be some of the most fertile ground for division, for butting heads between people.

It makes me think of my young children. If they're sick or they're tired, they just want to lay around. They're pretty calm. They're pretty mellow.

If they're healthy, if they're happy, they run around the house and they play together. And I have discovered when they run around the house and play together, they find all kinds of new and interesting ways to get hurt.

In their energetic enthusiasm, they run into doorways, they knock each other to the ground, somebody gets hurt. Oddly enough, they are more likely to get hurt when they're healthy and all is going well.

So what's the antidote? How do we avoid this? How do we avoid division? How do we avoid division in the church, in our families, among our colleagues, or anywhere else, with anyone else?

[6 : 50] That's what Paul provides us here in Philippians chapter 2. The short answer is humility. We need humility.

And humility is our subject of today and for the next couple of weeks. Let's examine what Paul has to say in his letter to the Philippians.

But I'll reverse the order of this passage. Paul begins with exhortations to be humble, and he follows that with what we might call the source and the motivation for our humility.

And I want to start with the latter. D.A. Carson once asked a famous theologian how he was able to remain humble despite all of his fame and despite all of the accomplishments he had made throughout his life and quite stunning career.

And the man replied, How on earth can anyone be arrogant when standing beside the cross? He was right. So that's where I'd like to begin.

[7 : 58] Let's consider how the gospel of Jesus Christ defines humility and spurs us to be humble people. Notice what Paul says in verse 5.

Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus. If we want to understand humility, we need to go to the source.

We have to study the character of Christ himself. Now verses 6 through 11 are interesting because they are deeply theological, yet theology is not Paul's primary motivation for writing this.

Again, the first part of the chapter including verse 5 shows us that he's actually motivated by more practical concerns, more pastoral concerns if you will. He wants to teach the Philippians something about humility.

But to understand humility, he believes we need to look to Christ. First and foremost, let's look to Christ. We must understand something about theology before we can truly grasp the practical.

[9 : 06] Actually, let me read through verses 6 through 11 once more before I expound upon them. Concerning Christ Jesus, Paul writes, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

If you were to ask a Muslim why he doesn't believe Jesus is the Christ, do you know what he'll say? Chances are, one of the first reasons he will give, if not his only reason, is that he cannot believe God could possibly descend so low as to become a human being.

That's their primary objective to him being the Christ. Even we as Christians recognize this is stunning humility on the part of Christ.

He existed in the form of God. He was eternally and immutably in the form of God. In Colossians, Paul says, he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[10 : 50] For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together. Now, you can't really tell a difference between that description of Christ and a description of God.

Why? It's because Jesus is God. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God.

And the Word was God. As Jesus himself professed many times, truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

I am. I am. He doesn't say I was. He says, I am. The name of God. I am.

[11 : 53] Even in his incarnation, he is the unchangeable God. Now, Paul uses the word form in verse 6. In the original Greek language, they had at least two words for form, morph, and schema.

And here's how they differ according to William Barclay again. Morph or morphy is the essential form which never alters.

Schema is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the essential morph of any human being is humanity, and this never changes.

But his schema is continually changing. A baby, a child, a boy, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man, always have the same morph of humanity, but the outward schema changes all the time.

So you see the difference there. Paul uses the word morph for morphy here. When he says Jesus was in the form of God, he means Jesus was God, and that is something that never changes despite his appearance as a man.

[13 : 09] And before we go any further, that is a fantastic reality that I really believe we need to firmly plant in our minds. Jesus never ceased to be God.

I fear that when many people think about Jesus, they think of Jesus, the Son of God, as a lesser version of God. And that's a mistake.

Some have even tragically and mistakenly believed he was one of God's creations. Absolutely not. He is either God, or he is nothing more than a human fraud, because he himself claimed I and the Father are one.

He made many claims of divinity. If he is not God, he was a blasphemous liar. The apostles were then all liars. The Old Testament prophets were liars.

The totality of the Bible is one big lie. Interestingly enough, most people, including Muslims, by the way, who are willing to acknowledge, are more than willing to acknowledge the historical reality of Jesus, even they are not willing to admit he is a liar.

[14 : 32] They would never call him such. They may reduce him to a prophet. Some will reduce him to a mere teacher of good ethics. But the vast majority of people will not call him a liar.

And if he's not a liar, who is he? He is who he says he is. He is God. He is God.

Yet he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He's in the form of God. He is equal with God. Yet in his incarnation, he doesn't cling to his divinity.

He acknowledges it, of course. In fact, he defends it throughout his life and ministry. But he doesn't consider it a thing to be grasped.

That word grasped refers to, you know, taking something, seizing something by force. In other words, it wasn't something he selfishly clung to throughout his earthly life in ministry.

[15 : 38] He did not say, you know what? I'm God. I'm not obligated to stoop so low as to become a man and suffer as men do.

He didn't say that. No, he voluntarily humbled himself to man's level by letting go of his divinity, so to speak. And I have to be careful how I talk about this.

To be clear, let me say again that he never ceased to be God. But he did relinquish many of his rights and many of his privileges as God.

For example, do you remember what he said when he was arrested and Peter attempted to defend him? He said, do you not think that I can appeal to my father and he will at once send more than twelve legions of angels?

He could have rescued himself at any moment. He could have taken himself out of this sinful, messy situation he was in here on this earth, but he didn't. And that's what I mean when I say he let go of his divinity.

[16 : 45] He remained God, but in many significant ways he willingly gave up his privileges as God. This is where humility begins.

It begins with the spirit, in other words. It begins with an attitude. It begins with a willingness to let go of self. Through Christ, or though Christ was in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.

He was willing to loosen his grip on all of those blessings and all of those privileges he had in exchange for the glory of God the Father and of course the good of God's people.

Selfless. While he had every right to grasp them, to hang on to them, to seize them, he didn't. Why? Because he wasn't motivated by self-serving interests.

He wasn't motivated by what was best for him or what brought him the most pleasure or the most comfort. He was willing to let go for the benefit of others, which is the beginning of humility.

[18 : 02] But of course, humility doesn't end with the right attitude. Verse 7, Christ emptied himself. By the way, notice how this entire passage takes Christ from his full glory in heaven down, down, down, one step at a time.

He sinks lower and lower in this humility as we continue reading. Christ emptied himself.

He nullified his full divinity. He made it void like pouring out a cup. He just emptied his advantages, privileges and all those privileges as God.

He forsook all of it for this mission that God set him on to accomplish. To clarify once again, Jesus did not cease to be God during his time on earth as a man.

It's theologically, even practically, crucial that we understand this. as one commentator has said, that emptying placed him indeed on the creaturely level in regard of the reality of human experience of growth and human capacity for suffering.

[19 : 18] But never for one moment did it, could it, make him other than the absolute and infallible master and guide of his redeemed. So if Jesus didn't cease to be God, what exactly did he give up when he became a man?

Well, first of all, he gave up at least some of his glory. In John 17, he prays, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

He had this glory, but evidently he did not have this glory at the point of this prayer, or at least a portion of it, or at least the fullness of it.

So he gave up some of his glory. Second, Jesus gave up a measure of his sovereign authority. In John 5.30, he says, I can do nothing on my own.

As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me. Later in John 6, he says, I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

[20 : 36] Time and time again, Christ makes it clear that he is operating under the authority of God the Father, not his own will. And perhaps nothing better illustrates this better than his prayer in the garden just before his arrest when he said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. You see the conflict there. Third, Jesus gave up his exercise of some of his divine attributes.

Again, he never ceased to be God. I hope you don't get tired of hearing me say that because it's important. He never ceased to be God, yet he voluntarily chose not to exercise the fullness of many of those attributes.

attributes. For example, God is all-seeing and all-knowing, and we see Jesus display those attributes. You may remember the story from John 1 where Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said, Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit.

And Nathanael is a little taken aback. How do you know me? And Jesus said, Well, I saw you under the fig tree. Well, Jesus was able to see Nathanael when Nathanael was nowhere near him.

[21 : 57] All-seeing. And yet, Jesus later admits in Matthew 24 when he's speaking of the day of his return concerning that day and hour, no one knows, he said.

Not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. So, we see Jesus exercising his divine abilities, but only to a limited measure.

Fourth, Jesus gave up the riches of heaven for the poverty of earth. This is how Paul explains it in 2 Corinthians 8. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

He left the perfection of heaven for this flawed, suffering, sinful world in which we live. And why did he do this?

In a word, grace. Grace. For your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. Fifth and final, Jesus gave up the intimacy he shared with his Father.

[23 : 23] We don't see a complete break in that relationship throughout his life in ministry, with the exception of one particular moment perhaps, when he hung on the cross.

While he suffered on the cross, he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? According to the biblical record, Jesus spoke seven times when he was on the cross.

His first words were, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. His last words seem to have been, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

So he calls out to his Father in the beginning. In the end, he calls out to his Father. But right there in the middle is this complete break in their fellowship and in their intimacy.

Jesus didn't cry out, Father, Father. No, he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Because he was forsaken in that moment.

[24 : 37] Now, obviously, we can't empty ourselves the same way or to the same extent as Christ. We don't have as much to empty. But we can still learn a tremendous amount from his example of humility.

If nothing else, it shows that humility has virtually no limits. But more to the point, let me just mention a few observations here to store in your memory for now.

We're going to get practical about this subject later on. But first of all, just as Jesus did not cease to be God when he emptied himself, we do not cease to be children of God when we empty ourselves.

Meditate on that. I'll explain it further later on. Second, just as Jesus' self-sacrifice was pleasing to God, our self-sacrifice is pleasing to God.

And third, just as Jesus knew his rights and privileges, but did not take advantage of them, we, God's children, believers in Christ, we have rights and we have privileges that we should be willing to hold on to only loosely.

[26 : 05] The first example that comes to my mind is 1 Peter 2.16, which says, live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

You are free, Peter says, but there are actually godly reasons to impose self-constraints on that freedom, namely for the good of others.

With that, let's continue in the text. Verse 7, Christ emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. We see his descent go even further.

He takes on the very essence of not just a man, but a servant or a slave in his incarnation. A *doulos* or a slave owned nothing.

Everything belonged to his master. As for Jesus, we don't see any evidence that he owned much of anything. Maybe the clothes on his back. He didn't have a house.

[27 : 09] He didn't own land. He didn't own a horse. In fact, he had to borrow a donkey when he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He had to borrow a room to meet with his disciples.

Ultimately, his grave was given to him. He owned nothing to speak of. Jesus waived his rights as Lord of all to become a lowly servant.

And even beyond his material possessions, scripture says the son of man came to serve, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And let's keep in mind something else Jesus said. He told his disciples, a disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciples to be like his teacher and the servant like his master.

If our master could reduce himself to such a lowly position to serve, and keep in mind, he started much higher than we ever could.

[28 : 15] How could we ever protest becoming humble servants ourselves? Jesus was born in the likeness of men.

The eternal son of God willingly left the glory of heaven, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, and was born the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth.

In Galatians 4, Paul says God sent his son, born of a woman. The son was with God in heaven, came to earth in submission to his father's will, and was born of a woman.

And that word sent, God sent, implies his eternal divinity, of course, while the word born reveals his humanity, God-man. As we often sing around Christmastime, veiled in flesh, the Godhead see.

Hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man, with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Apart from sin, God became all that man is.

[29 : 32] I love the following commentary from Martin Luther. He writes, Christianity does not begin at the top, as all other religions do.

It begins at the bottom. Therefore, whenever you are concerned to think and act about your salvation, you must put away all speculations about the majesty, all thoughts of works, traditions, and philosophy, indeed the law of God itself.

And you must run directly to the manger and the mother's womb. Embrace this infant and virgin's child in your arms, and look at him, born, being nursed, growing up, going about in human society, teaching, dying, rising again, ascending above all the heavens, and having authority over all things.

In this way, you can shake off all terrors and errors as the sun dispels the clouds. Love that. Christianity begins at the bottom.

It begins in the most unthinkable place. Defying all human wisdom, it begins in a manger with a newborn baby boy.

[30 : 48] It's just amazing to think about. Almighty God became a man. He was a baby. He was a child. He grew up and developed as children do.

Luke says he increased in wisdom and stature. He experienced hunger and thirst. He suffered pain. He felt sadness.

He got tired. He got weak. Hebrews 2.14 says, Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things.

Then in Hebrews 4 we're told, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

And let's not forget that he ultimately died just as we all do. He experienced it all. Now perhaps this seems silly, all things considered, but one of the most stunning realities to me about Christ is found in Isaiah 53, verse 2, when it says, He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him and no beauty that we should desire Him.

[32 : 13] So much for the depictions of the handsome Jesus with the halo around His head. Evidently, He didn't stand out in a crowd.

He wasn't any more attractive than anyone else, possibly less attractive than most people. Just imagine what the age of Instagram would have thought of Him if He were here in the flesh today.

Even something as trivial as physical appearance, Christ was right down here with the rest of us. Do you see that? Next, Paul says, Jesus was found in human form.

In other words, He had the appearance of a man. This may seem like a redundant thing to say because Paul already told us He was born in the likeness of man, but he's using different words to communicate different things here.

Likeness refers to the essence or the nature of a thing. Form, in this case, refers to the outward appearance of a thing. Jesus adopted the essence of humanity, but He also walked as a man.

[33 : 23] Looking at Him, glancing at Him, He's an ordinary man. So Jesus leaves glory, He casts aside many of His rights and privileges, casts aside much of His authority as Lord, becomes a servant, becomes a man, and as a man descends even further to become a humble man.

Verse 8, He humbled Himself. He humbled Himself before God, but He also, incredibly, humbled Himself before other men.

And that's made very clear in many, many stories, such as Him washing the disciples' feet. It's made most clear during His arrest, and His trial, and His crucifixion.

In his book, *The Adequate Man*, Paul Rees provides this excellent observation. He says, look at Him, this amazing Jesus.

He is helping Joseph make a yoke in that little carpenter shop at Nazareth. This is the one who, apart from self-emptying, could far more easily make a solar system.

[34 : 35] or a galaxy of systems. Look at Him again, dressed like a slave with towel and basin for His menial equipment. He is bathing the feet of some friends of His who, but for their quarrelsomeness, should have been washing His feet.

He humbled Himself. Don't forget this, cries Paul, to these dear friends of His at Philippi. Don't forget this. When the slightest impulse arises to become self-assertive and self-seeking, and so to break the bond of your fellowship with one another.

Look at this amazing Jesus. Specifically, Paul points to His death as evidence of His humility.

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. To think of God as becoming a man is more than enough to marvel at, but to think of Him dying, that is in many ways beyond our comprehension.

We can believe it, but I don't know that we can fully, fully grasp it. And if we think Jesus was something like a superhuman with no fear of pain, no concerns at all, let me read to you from Hebrews chapter 5.

[35 : 58] Hebrews says, in the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death.

Does that sound like a man who had no apprehension whatsoever about dying? And yet the passage continues, although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.

And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

It's not that Christ didn't feel dread about the crucifixion to come. He was a man after all. He was human. He was also humble.

He was submissive. He was obedient to His Father's will. Despite what it meant for Him personally, He went where the Father told Him to go.

[37 : 06] That's humility. Last but not least, regarding Christ's descent anyhow, Paul says Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

He didn't die peacefully in His sleep. He didn't suffer a quick beheading like John the Baptist. I think it can safely be argued even worse than stoning.

He was crucified. God was crucified. Crucifixion was intentionally designed to be the most cruel, the most excruciating, the most painful, the most shameful, the most humiliating death of all.

It may sound strange to say, but it actually took multiple empires, centuries, to perfect crucifixion.

And that tells you something about man. In a very old book called The Life of Christ, the author says, a death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of the horrible and ghastly.

[38 : 36] Dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, shame, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of intended wounds, all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness.

The unnatural position made every movement painful. The lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish. Even the Bible says, cursed is every man who hangs on a tree.

Now that has deeper theological meaning, but yeah, I would say any man that hangs on a tree is cursed. It's no wonder the Jews found a crucified Messiah to be a stumbling block.

Even the disciples, they struggle to believe that the Messiah could be crucified until it happened. Until it happened.

Even we, as Christians, may meditate on the divine identity of Christ and think, how could this be? God crucified?

[40 : 04] God, as Romans 11.33 says, oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways.

Go back to what that theologian told D.A. Carson. How on earth can anyone be arrogant when standing beside the cross? That is why we've begun this, what will be a relatively brief study of humility by looking at the humility of Christ in His incarnation and death.

It is the supreme act of humility. And my challenge to you is to meditate on Christ's humility throughout the week.

And then when we return to this subject next week, we can look at ourselves and what it means for us to be humble. For now, let's pray. Heavenly Father, when we come to thank You and praise You, it's hard to know where to begin.

All that You've done that is really beyond our comprehension to think that You came in the flesh. That enough is stunning.

[41 : 36] But to see Your life, the humility, the patience, the long suffering with the sinners around Your Son throughout His life and throughout His ministry, His obedience to Your will at every step, His willingness to suffer the way He did, not only the mocking and the shame, but the physical torment.

He died, and He died on a cross in a most excruciating way. And all of this was not for Himself. It was for Your glory and the good of Your people.

people. Lord, I pray that we can have even an ounce of that kind of humility, that kind of love and respect and interest for other people, more than ourselves.

I pray that You'll guide us in that direction and I pray that You will forgive us in Christ for the pride that I know we have and that I know we struggle with day after day.

I pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. We're dismissed.